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SUBJECT: NCP REMOVE GOVERNOR OF UPPER NILE STATE, CREATING NEW
TENSIONS BETWEEN DINKA AND SHILLUK

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On November 14, the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) announced the removal of Upper Nile Governor Gatluak Deng Garang and the new National Congress Party (NCP) nomination of William Othwong Awer. While the NCP maintains control of the governor's seat of Upper Nile State, any changes in Southern Sudan must be approved and announced by the GOSS. The change in governors, and the timing, is causing new tensions between Dinka and Shilluk communities already poised for a new round of conflict in the area. Speculation abounds on why the NCP is replacing the incumbent Nuer governor with a Shilluk, however, some believe that it is another attempt by the NCP to create divisions in an already contentious political environment. GOSS officials remain hopeful that the new governor will be able to reestablish calm in the area and exercise influence over the restive Shilluk community. End Summary.

NCP Remove Governor of Upper Nile

¶2. (SBU) On November 14, the National Congress Party (NCP) nominated, and the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) approved, a new governor for Upper Nile State, William Othwong Awer, a Shilluk, vice Gatluak Deng Garang, a Nuer. While there had been rumors in the week leading up to the announcement, it took everyone by surprise, and the incumbent governor in particular. A USG team visiting Malakal, the capitol of Upper Nile State, met with the incumbent governor, Gatluak, on Saturday, November 14, and only learned afterwards of the announcement.

¶3. (SBU) Gatluak has refused to accept the NCP decision to remove him. Gatluak claims he was not properly notified about his removal from President Omar Beshir or the GOSS. He has also enlisted the support of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) Joint Integrated Units (JIU) in Malakal to block the airport so that the incoming governor cannot land and take office. The SAF JIU in Malakal consists mostly of former Nuer militia from the area. Sources close to the governor told us that the governor is now wearing a military uniform and staying in his office.

Dinka/Shilluk Tensions Intensify

¶4. (SBU) before the announcement was made, there were reports of Dinka and Shilluk tribesmen massing and arming around Canal in Upper Nile State. Since the announcement, tensions between the two communities in and around Malakal have increased. On November 15, local government officials told us that Shilluk had celebrated in the markets following the announcement of a Shilluk governor on Saturday night, provoking a number of small incidents between Dinka and Shilluk. The Dinka community is refusing to accept the new appointment of a Shilluk governor.

¶5. (SBU) Some Malakal residents see the NCP decision to replace the governor as further proof of the NCP trying to increase political tensions in Upper Nile State. Many believe the NCP is trying to sideline Nuer representation in the NCP by replacing the governor, in line with other recent decisions on Riek Gai and Nuer positions in the SAF. Others believe the NCP is possibly trying to support the Shilluk and Lam Akol's SPLM-DC, who enjoy considerable support in Malakal. While there are some differences of opinion about why the NCP removed the incumbent governor and replaced him with a Shilluk, it is clear that the decision will exacerbate tensions between the Dinka and Shilluk communities in the state and probably create new tensions between the Shilluk and Nuer.

GOSS Officials Remain Hopeful

¶6. (SBU) Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) Deputy Secretary General Anne Itto and Undersecretary for Presidential Affairs Cirino Hiteng Ofuho spoke optimistically about the new governor on November 17. Cirino told us that while the new governor is a Shilluk who split from the SPLM along with Lam in 1991, he subsequently fell out with Lam later and joined the NCP. They are not believed to be allies currently. The new governor is also reportedly a member of the Shilluk royal family. Gatluak told us during our visit to Malakal that the Shilluk king recently came out against Lam and the SPLM-DC militia, and Itto reported that both Minister of Internal Affairs Gier Chuang Aluong and Minister of Regional Cooperation Oyai Deng Ajak --the former a Shilluk-- have spoken with the new governor and believe he will work to resolve some of the tensions between the Shilluk and

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Dinka and use his influence over the Shilluk community of Upper Nile.

¶7. (SBU) Cirino explained that there is usually a balance of power in Upper Nile State between the three major tribal groups. Recently the balance was maintained as follows: governor - Nuer, the deputy governor - Dinka, and the speaker of the state parliament - Shilluk. Since the new governor is Shilluk, most believe the deputy governor will be replaced by a Nuer and the speaker of the parliament by a Dinka. No such nominations have yet been made, and the newly nominated governor has yet to take his seat in Malakal.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: Although the reasons behind the removal of the incumbent governor are still not clear, the nomination of William Othwonh Awer, a Shilluk, will increase tensions in the already volatile Upper Nile area. The UN and others are preparing for possible clashes between the two communities which have been locked in a cycle of tribal conflict since January 2009. Additionally, the involvement of the SAF JIU in defending the incumbent governor could trigger new problems between the SAF and SPLA JIU units in the area if the SPLA are asked to intervene. End Comment.

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